

THE QUAVER,

WITH WHICH IS PUBLISHED "CHORAL HARMONY,"

A monthly Advocate of Popular Musical Education,
And Exponent of the Letter-note Method.

Correspondence and Advertisements to be forwarded to 20, Paternoster Row, London, E.C.
The charge for Advertisements is 1s. 6d. for the first twenty words, and 6d. for each succeeding ten.

No. 2.]

FEBRUARY 1, 1876.

[One Penny.]

Musical Notation.

DURING the last twenty-five years, something equivalent to a revolution has occurred in the mode of teaching vocal music. The old English "DO-FOR-THE-KEY-TONE" principle has again asserted its supremacy; and under different names, and by means of various methods of instruction, it is gradually, but surely, becoming the mode of disseminating a knowledge of music amongst the universal Million. The Rev. J. J. Waite, with his "figure" method, was probably the earliest to demonstrate the ease with which large numbers could be taught to read, when the "key-relationship" of the notes was clearly perceived by the singer. At a later period came the *Tonic Sol-fa* method, and through the labours of its founder and teachers a large proportion of the work of restoration has been accomplished. At the present time there are busily working in the same field *Letter-note*, and quite a host of other methods, differing more or less in certain points, but one and all agreeing upon the fundamental principle of *Do-for-the-key-tone*.

One result of all this has been, that a new generation of singers has sprung up, who have less reverence for the time-honoured characters of the ordinary notation, and greater willingness to adopt any notation, if it will only enable them to enjoy music's pleasures without taxing over much their time or their energy in learning it. It is now pretty generally admitted that, for the purpose of training the masses to read, the ordinary notation does not present facilities to the singer equal to those which it confers upon the instrumentalist—this arises out of the very nature of things. One of the elements of music is *Tune*, or *Pitch*. But there are two kinds of pitch: *absolute pitch*—

or the relation which any sound bears to all the infinity of sounds comprised in our musical system—concerns the player most.

Relative pitch—or the relation which a given sound bears, not to *all* the sounds in music, but to the scale formed by the key-tone and its six accompanying sounds—is what most affects the singer. A musical instrument has a certain number of manuals, valves, finger-holes, or frets: these represent all the sounds which it can produce, although for a given tune only a small number may be required. The *stave*, therefore, provides a *musical chart*, showing places for the whole of the sounds; and the absolute position of the note enables the player to find the absolute position of the manual called for. On the other hand, the singer—at all events while *learning* to read—thinks only of the *seven sounds of the key*: all other sounds are, for the time being, non-existent, or, it introduced at all, occur as something foreign to the key in which he is singing.

Out of this mode of writing music, therefore, a little difficulty arises to the singer; for the notation not only fails to show with sufficient clearness the *relative pitch* of the sounds he has to sing, but it even forces him to take cognizance of sounds which to him are practically non-existent, and which, if really sounded, might cause him to lose his musical balance, and topple over altogether.

The inconvenience experienced by the learner is, in some degree, similar to what would accrue if, instead of dividing our year into months, and weeks, we were to count only the days, reckoning from the 1st on to the 365th. Most persons have a series of engagements for each seven days; and by reckoning off each day's work for a week, and then repeating the process for every succeeding week, they fulfil the year's duties. But suppose, instead of adopting this simple arrangement, we were to reckon thus:—on the 1st day of the year we go to church,



then again on the 8th, then on the 15th, the 22nd, and so on to the 365th, although we might not experience much inconvenience during the earlier part of the year, we certainly should towards the end of it. The singer would feel even greater inconvenience if *compelled* to do what the player does from choice, reading each note by its position in the *year* of musical sounds, instead of reckoning it as the 1st, 2nd, or other sound in his musical *week*—the seven sounds of the key. Yet the ordinary stave, explicit enough with regard to the *absolute* pitch of its notes, gives no direct information as to their *relative* pitch.

But this little difficulty is, to a learner, rendered a great one, by the fact that the stave does not show a *distinct* position for each sound; for, by means of accidentals, any line or space may be used to represent many different, indeed *antagonistic*, sounds. Further, the difficulty is rendered greater through certain ambiguities of the notation in its mode of using accidentals. The *natural* is at one time used to express a *flat*; at another, a *sharp*; and at another still, something which, to the singer, is practically *nothing*. In one key the same musical fact is expressed by means of a *sharp*, which, in another, is indicated by a *double sharp*; and precisely similar is the mode of using the *flat* and *double flat*. A note may have an accidental, and yet be one of the natural sounds of the key; and, *vice versa*, a sound foreign to the key, may occur without any accidental to warn the singer that it is such. But the difficulty is greater still when the learner finds these ambiguities occurring precisely when he is required to accomplish what, to him, is really a hard thing—viz., to produce, in tune, a sound foreign to the key in which he is singing. In such a case the notation ought to be as clear as day, but it is just here that it is most perplexing. The young pupil, as he sighs over the task imposed upon him, may well say, "Show me clearly what it is you want me to do, and I'll try to do it; but how is it possible for me to accomplish anything, if I don't understand what is wanted?"

Of course the difficulty can be overcome by a certain amount of application. Possibly, to pupils who are being educated for the musical profession, the head-work it involves may prove an agreeable relief to other duties. To such pupils, also, long habit in playing may possibly associate the proper sound with the symbol which indicates it, or with the manual which produces it, and thus enable them to read vocal

music. But, in this case, the association of the sound with the symbol, or the manual, gives the same mnemonic help which the Sol-fa syllables afford to the vocalist who is learning apart from an instrument, and who has nothing but his innate sense of *tune* to guide him. Our remarks on the subject of notation, therefore, apply to the latter—the amateur pupils—an ever-widening and now rapidly increasing circle.

That these, and other difficulties of notation, small though they be, do really prove a stumbling-block and a prolific cause of failure, is a fact of which most singing-class teachers are quite aware. Probably this fact is more evident to them—the *school-masters* of the art, who teach its three R's—than to its *professors of elocution*—the music-masters; and, possibly, the wearers of the shoe, their pupils, feel more than either where it pinches. With the music-masters, however, excellency of tone and style is primary, and fluency in reading secondary; and, perhaps, rightly so. But, whether primary or secondary, great must be the difference to the music-masters in teaching a pupil who can already read, compared with *making notes* to one who has not yet learned them.

But, even amongst the musical profession, there is a growing feeling in favour of an alteration of some kind in the notation, so as to adapt it to the exigencies of the singer as much as to those of the player. Thus advocates of a new notation, and reconstructors of the old, now receive a patient hearing where, formerly, they would have been extinguished with all possible dispatch. So great, indeed, has been the change of opinion that, quite possibly, music publishers might even now venture to adapt the notation to the specific requirements of the singer, if only the innovation was sure of meeting with general approval.

Perhaps the time for such an innovation has not yet arrived, however; or, just as likely, publishers may be only "waiting for a victim" who shall launch some tentative venture upon the stormy sea of musical politics, or else for a musical dictator who shall intervene, and settle the long-pending differences "'twixt *Tweedledum* and *Tweedledee*."

If the first of these conjectures is the true one, time will work wonders; if the second, there is, at this moment, an abundance of such schemes afloat; and if the third, the problem may, as popular musical education progresses, receive its solution at the hands of an enlightened PUBLIC.

[Continued.]

Household Surgery.

UNDER the above title it is intended to give, from time to time, hints as to the readiest way of treating the most common ailments of the pianoforte and harmonium. A very slight disorder will sometimes render them, for the moment, useless; and, if even a temporary cure is practicable, it may serve the purpose until the help of a skilled operator can be obtained. Prevention, however, is better than cure; and every player should take care to keep his instrument in the state of health necessary for the proper performance of its onerous duties.

Keep your instrument in a dry, moderately warm atmosphere: it is easily affected by, and may receive permanent injury from, damp.

Keep it free from dust, internally as well as externally. In a pianoforte, especially, any accumulation of dust, and any little articles such as pins, crumbs, chips, &c., may cause jarring noises. Anything loose, which ought to be tight, in the mechanism of the instrument itself; or even small articles—a glass for instance—resting on the instrument, will often produce a rattling noise. It may even happen that the cause of the noise is not in actual contact with the instrument: a glass ornament, a yard or two off,

may be set in vibration when certain notes, with which it is in accord, are sounded.

Keep your pianoforte *always* in tune. It is good for the instrument: if kept regularly tuned to a uniform pitch, it will, after a while, settle down to its work, and keep in tune. It is good for the player: the pianoforte is not absolutely just in its intonation, even at its best; but when out of tune its effect, if it has any effect at all, is to render a good ear a bad one, teaching it to remain content with intervals which are out of tune.

Announcement.

A COURSE OF LESSONS IN HARMONY is now appearing, monthly, in this Journal; and a class for study will shortly commence, to be conducted by means of exercises forwarded, per post, for correction.

A knowledge of Harmony is invaluable alike to the Vocalist, the Pianist, the Harmoniumist and the Organist—giving them a *reading* power which otherwise they could only attain after many years of study; and also enabling them better to understand and appreciate, and, therefore, *enjoy* in and *enjoy*, the music which they perform.

First Steps in Musical Composition.—(continued from last Number.)

8. The study of musical composition, therefore, embraces the following subjects:—

I.—**MELODY**, subdivided into *Rhythm* and *Number*; the former dealing with the rate of movement, accent, and relative duration of the sounds; and the latter, with the comparative lengths of the constituent portions of a musical sentence—viz., the *foot*, the *phrase*, the *section*, and the *period*.

II.—**HARMONY**, treating primarily of the combination of the sounds into *chords*; and, secondarily, of the mode of distributing them into *parts* for performance by voices or instruments.

III.—**COUNTERPOINT**—with its varieties, *plain* and *florid*; and its branches, *imitation*, *Double Counterpoint*, and *Fugue*—discussing more fully the distribution partially studied in the preceding division, and having reference to the melodies which the various parts perform individually, quite as much as to the harmonies they produce in combination.

9. We shall commence our course of lessons by studying the second of these divisions—Harmony. After a certain amount of progress has been made, if judged expedient, we shall introduce the subject of Melody also, studying the two departments separately, but working them simultaneously. The young student may wish to try his powers in writing original melody; and, if he only sets about it in a right way, the practice will do him good, and tend to sharpen his musical faculties. Therefore, even during the earlier lessons, it is expedient to give him some information with regard to the subject of Melody.

10. As stated in paragraph 2, Harmony consists of a succession of chords arranged in obedience to certain laws. These laws—the result of the accumulated experience of centuries—besides treating of the formation of chords, teach what may, and what may not, be done in weaving chords together in order to produce a true harmonic web—harmony which is *negatively* good, by avoiding what is bad, and *positively* good, by taking example from models of excellence.

11. As the various chords are obtained by means of different combinations of the sounds of the scale, before proceeding to their study the young musician should feel in some degree at home in the subject of *Interval*, i.e. the intervals which the sounds of the scale form among themselves; their *size*, as seconds, thirds, etc.; their *kind*, as simple or compound, major or minor, perfect or imperfect, augmented or diminished. The last two of these will receive attention, in this course of lessons, when it becomes necessary to study them: the others are explained in "The Letter-note Singing Method," Chap. II. The student should, if necessary, thoroughly revise the subject so as to be, not only quite clear as regards the thing itself, but also familiar with the *names* of the

various intervals, and the mode of expressing them in musical notation. Otherwise the learner, starting in a fog as to the meaning of the terms employed, can only, *at best*, dimly grope his way through; and, *at worst*, might possibly leave off in deeper darkness than he began.

[Continued in our next.]

Sacred v. Secular.

ALL competent judges will admit that between the "Hallelujah Chorus" on the one hand, and the tune, "Pop goes the Weasel," on the other, there is a wide gulf, and a line of demarcation so well-defined, that even the youngest tyro can have no doubt whatever as to the former being *sacred* music, and the latter, *secular*. Quite probably the tyro is right, as he *always* is; yet, if he only looks around him with an enquiring eye, and, to the aid of the enquiring eye, brings a good memory, he may make a few rather startling discoveries: by diligently comparing this with that, and that with something else, he may find out things which will cause him to open his eyes much wider than is necessary, or even quite becoming, in a look of enquiry merely.

Marked as is the contrast between the two kinds of music alluded to, and distant as the poles their respective position and value, it must appear rather surprising to discover, in some of the most popular collections of psalmody, and in one of the most popular doxologies used a few years ago, this bit of melody:—



Now every profane whistler of "Pop goes the Weasel" will recognise it here: it is the tune, pure and simple.

The question arises, whence is the coincidence? How comes it that tunes, so completely antagonistic in their objects, should thus collide? Is one a plagiarism of the other? On the other hand, if they have been, each after its kind, an independent creation of musical fancy, how is it they resemble each other so closely, and how does it happen that one is set to sacred, and the other to secular words—and *such* words? Could the composer of a DOXOLOGY have been haunted, even in his dreams, by music of such questionable origin; or was there a lingering reminiscence of tender years floating through the mind of the other, when he made himself responsible for this effusion of his?

Now, *there* is an enigma for the tyro to solve; and, if he is fond of such, here is another:—



In the land of its birth the air, of which the above is the commencement, holds a position very many degrees higher than the last song; yet, having been identified with very humorous words, and also used over and over again to other words of a similar character, it is at the very antipodes of church music. Nevertheless, in a book of instruction compiled by a well-known and favourite composer, this air appears as a church tune.

Here, again, arises the question, if the music is good as a humorous song, how can it possibly serve

the purpose of a church tune; and *vice versa*? Who is right, the unknown and probably untutored composer of the popular air, or the adaptor, a musician of admitted eminence?

Numberless examples of a similar nature might be adduced. Anybody who chooses to ferret out such resemblances will find plenty of cases in which one composer *apparently* copies another, and yet with a totally different object in view, as in the first example given above. As for the second, those who are in the least degree conversant with the incessant interchanging there is of sacred and secular words to the same melody, can find, in abundance, instances of a similar transmigration of souls.

But other paradoxes await you, Mr. Tyro: what do you say to this?—



Here you have two bits of melody which, allowing for difference of *key* and *tempo*, are almost the same. They are both by the same composer—the renowned MENDELSSOHN—nevertheless, he has set the one melody to sacred, and the other to secular words. The first of the above examples is taken from the Choral forming the second movement in Mendelssohn's beautiful setting of the 13th Psalm; and the other is the commencement of his "Spring Song," Op. 19.

Young and enquiring musicians, who are fond of looking at the *insides* of things, will now find something to think over until the subject is resumed next month.

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